

# Texas Veterans Voice

WINTER 2014  
texasveterans.com



A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS VETERANS LAND BOARD ☆ JERRY PATTERSON, CHAIRMAN



SERVING TEXAS VETERANS

## GENERAL INFORMATION

800.252.VETS (8387)  
512.463.5060

## VETERANS HOMES

### Ussery-Roan

Amarillo, Texas  
806.322.VETS (8387)

### Lamun-Lusk-Sanchez

Big Spring, Texas  
432.268.VETS (8387)

### Clyde W. Cosper

Bonham, Texas  
903.640.VETS (8387)

### Ambrosio Guillen

El Paso, Texas  
915.751.0967

### Frank M. Tejeda

Floresville, Texas  
830.216.9456

### Alfredo Gonzalez

McAllen, Texas  
956.682.4224

### William R. Courtney

Temple, Texas  
254.791.8280

### Watkins-Logan

Tyler, Texas  
903.617.6150

## VETERANS CEMETERIES

### Central Texas

#### State Veterans Cemetery

Killeen, Texas  
254.616.1770

### Coastal Bend

#### State Veterans Cemetery

Corpus Christi, Texas  
361.248.4830

### Rio Grande Valley

#### State Veterans Cemetery

Mission, Texas  
956.583.7227

#### Texas State Veterans Cemetery

at Abilene

Abilene, Texas  
325.673.4446

## More Texas Veterans Seek Land and Home Loans in 2014

Since its creation, the Texas Veterans Land Board (VLB) has funded more than \$10.8 billion to serve more than 200,000 veterans with low-interest housing, home improvement and land loans. During fiscal year 2014, the VLB saw an increase in land loan applications that was 40 percent more than the previous year. And by August 31, the VLB recorded 1,104 closed land loans – a 23 percent increase over 2013. The VLB also successfully helped veterans and members of the armed forces avoid land loan forfeitures, as 72 percent of eligible files were removed from forfeiture. The program's housing and home improvement loan programs each saw an increase of 3 percent in activity, with the VLB recording 2,030 closed housing loans and 266 home improvement loans. Loan activity kept the VLB's benefits program strong, adding more than half a billion dollars to its portfolio of 28,119 active loans worth a total of \$2.75 billion.

Throughout the year, the VLB focused on improving efficiencies within its operations and building an increasingly collaborative working environment. VLB loan operations and marketing teams built a strategy to more readily connect prospective buyers and sellers. In addition to its paid advertising campaign, an outbound call initiative was introduced to actively reach veterans and military members. By working diligently with the Texas General Land Office survey and appraisal teams, the time needed to process loans was decreased, helping VLB land loan customers get to the closing table faster.

The VLB is now working toward its 2015 goal of serving even more veterans and military members. Already, the VLB is partnering with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)



VLB staff answer questions at a veterans benefits fair.

and the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to address veterans needs via benefits fairs and its call service center—the Texas Veterans Hotline, available at 800-252-VETS (8387).

"Together with our federal, state and county veterans organizations, the VLB can help more veterans and military members get access to the benefits they have earned and deserve," said Bill McLemore, Texas VLB Executive Secretary and Deputy Commissioner.

By partnering with the VA, TVC and County Veteran Service Officers (VSOs), the VLB hopes to better serve veterans seeking assistance with health care, education and disability needs in addition to supporting veterans through the Texas VLB loan, long-term care and cemetery programs. County VSOs play a critical role in building awareness of VLB benefits among veterans. Strengthening intergovernmental partnership between the VA, TVC and VSOs has proven to be an effective approach in helping Texas veterans, military members and their families access the important benefits and services available to them. ☆

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# A Message from the Chairman

BY VETERANS LAND BOARD CHAIRMAN JERRY PATTERSON



Fellow Veterans:

Welcome to the winter edition of *Veterans Voice*. In this issue you'll read about the highly successful VLB loan programs, which have funded more than \$10 billion in loans since 1946. And the staff continues to find ways to improve as evidenced by 23 percent more VLB home loans funded in 2014 compared to last year.

Another story describes an incredibly touching and rare ceremony held in Austin recently to refold the flag that covered the casket of Capt. George Meerdink. A Vietnam War casualty, Capt. Meerdink was the father of Jennifer Henry, the Budget and Planning Director for the Texas Gen-

eral Land Office, which runs the VLB.

There's also an article about numerous Veterans Day parades and activities involving residents of the far-flung Texas State Veterans Homes. Local support for the homes and their honored residents has always been remarkable, and active-duty armed forces members are frequent visitors.

Residents of Texas State Veterans Homes are not only honored for their service, they receive great care. In fact, the Clyde W. Cosper Texas State Veterans Home in Bonham recently won the 2014 Bronze Commitment to Quality Award from the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living. For more information on veterans homes and cemeteries, as well as low-cost home, land and home improvement loans, please call 800.252.VETS (8387) or visit [texasveterans.com](http://texasveterans.com). Or, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/TXVLB>.



SERVING TEXAS VETERANS  
*for life*

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#### Executive Secretary

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#### Texas Veterans Voice

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## General Land Office Honors Fallen Vietnam Hero

The unfolding story of a heroic veteran was celebrated at a special Veterans Day service on November 7 at the [Texas General Land Office](#). Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson assisted in re-folding and representing a U.S. flag to the daughter of Capt. George Meerdink, a Vietnam War casualty. The flag belongs to the family of Jennifer Henry, the Budget and Planning Director for the Texas General Land Office (GLO). It covered her father's casket as his body was returned from Vietnam in 1969. Henry discovered the flag amid family memorabilia while assembling items from her father's combat service for the [Voices of Veterans](#) oral history program, part of the [Texas Veterans Land Board](#) at the GLO. Henry noticed the flag was in disarray and folded incorrectly—something Patterson and fellow Marines rectified on Nov. 7.

The program began with the presentation of the colors by the Marines of Weapons Company 1/23, followed by an address by Dan West, Vice Commander of the Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars. Patterson was the keynote speaker, followed by a Marine flag ceremony.

Henry was just 4 years old when her father was killed during a mortar attack on February 22, 1969, during the much-storied Dewey Canyon raid in Quang Tri Province. Capt. Meerdink was 33 years old. Much of the information about her father's combat



Commissioner Patterson accepts the re-folded U.S. flag and presents it to the Meerdink family.

service and role in Dewey Canyon was lost over time, until Henry consulted an online Vietnam Memorial Wall website. There, she found comments made by those who knew her late father. During Henry's research, she found photographs and personal anecdotes about her father from his brothers-in-arms. Henry gave the information to the [Voices of Veterans](#) oral history program.

"Capt. Meerdink signed up for front line duty when he didn't have to," Patterson said. "That's a hero."

A new [Voices of Veterans website](#) recently debuted, making it easier for viewers to access and upload stories like Capt. Meerdink's. The [Voices of Veterans](#) program also has a new [Facebook page](#) that features photos, stories and historical items and events. Veterans who wish to add their stories to the [Voices of Veterans](#) program should contact the VLB at 800-252-8387 or by email at [vlbinfo@glo.texas.gov](mailto:vlbinfo@glo.texas.gov). ☆



# Texas State Veterans Homes Host Veterans Day Celebrations

A parade honored the heroes at the Watkins-Logan Texas State Veterans Home on November 11 in celebration of Veterans Day. The home's staff and the community celebrated all veterans by holding the first annual Veterans Day Parade along with a cook-out sponsored and hosted by Brookshire's Grocery. The parade included special guest Stevie Jo Rosenbalm from "The Voice," Season 6. A custom-made five-tiered cake and goodies were provided by Adalante Catering Co. in Tyler. Students from UT Tyler joined the celebration, and the parade included the ALERT Academy Cadets, Tyler Junior College Apache Bells and Twirlers, Winona Volunteer Fire Department, Green Acres Military Group, VFW Post 7122 Ladies Auxiliary, Ebenezer Day Care children, Bell Elementary School,



A color guard leads the way in Tyler.

Tyler Model A Ford Club, "Bucky the Clown," Heart to Heart Hospice and Compass Hospice, Kingdom Riders Motorcycle Group, Cross Spoke Riders and Tyler Chapter of Christian Motorcycle Association.

Nearly 400 people attended the event.

In addition to the parade held at the Watkins-Logan Texas State Veterans Home, several celebrations were held to honor veterans at VLB State Veterans Homes across Texas.



Veteran residents in Temple enjoyed the Military Ball.

Veterans Day festivities were also held at the Clyde W. Cospers Texas State Veterans Home in Bonham, the William R. Courtney Texas State Veterans Home in Temple and the Frank M. Tejada Texas State Veterans Home in Floresville.

The heroes at the William R. Courtney Texas State Veterans Home were honored by a full day of activities, with Col. Matt Melvin serving as keynote speaker. Soldiers from Ft. Hood's 13th Expeditionary Sustainment Command planned and organized the ceremony, featuring a color guard and a bagpipe performance of the National Anthem. The William R. Courtney State Veterans Home hosted a Veterans Military Ball and recognized Veteran Medical Director Dr. Jack Weinblatt who served as Medical Director of the home from December 2000 to March 2013. ☆

# Texas State Veterans Home Earns Bronze National Quality Award

The high-quality care at the Clyde W. Cospers Texas State Veterans Home in Bonham has been recognized with the 2014 Bronze Commitment to Quality Award by the American Health Care Association (AHCA) and National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL). This award is the first of three distinctions possible through the National Quality Award Program. The program honors centers across the nation that have demonstrated their commitment to improving quality care for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

The Texas Veterans Land Board contracted with Touchstone Communities to manage the Clyde W. Cospers State Veterans Home.

Texas State Veterans Homes provide affordable, skilled, long-term nursing care for Texas veterans, their spouses and Gold Star parents. Eight homes are located across Texas and each facility is designed to enhance quality of life with a clean, caring and dignified setting appropriate for those men and women who have served our country with honor. ☆



Clyde W. Cospers Texas State Veterans Home staff members.

# New Texas Veterans App for Your Phone

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission has developed a mobile phone app to give Texas veterans quick access to crisis hotlines and other resources.

The app, which can be downloaded from both Google Play and the iTunes App Store, works on most iPhones and Android mobile phones. It provides information about local, state and national resources available to Texas military veterans. By using the application, veterans can get direct access to the national Suicide



Prevention Lifeline, Hotline for Women Veterans and the VLB in addition to other services available to veterans.

The Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a free, confidential 24/7 phone line staffed by qualified responders, many of whom are veterans themselves, with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans, their families and friends can call 800-273-8255 to obtain help with mental health issues or other challenges faced by veterans transitioning back to civilian life. ☆



# A Day to Remember: Commemorating D-Day 70 Years Later

June 6 marked the 70th year anniversary of D-Day—a day that is remembered as the most significant turning point in World War II. To commemorate this day, two D-Day veterans shared intimate accounts of their actions in Normandy with nearly 400 audience members at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin. The event was co-sponsored by the VLB and the [Voices of Veterans](#) oral history program.

Program attendees watched “D-Day 3D: Normandy 1944,” an IMAX movie narrated by Tom Brokaw illustrating the elaborate strategy executed during the invasion. Immediately following the film, D-Day veterans [Robert \(Bob\) Bearden](#) and [Johnny Marino](#) took center stage to share first-hand experiences of storming Normandy. Also in attendance were Texas veteran residents from the [Frank M. Tejeda Texas State Veterans Home](#) in Floresville and the [William R. Courtney Texas State Veterans Home](#) in Temple.

Bearden served with the U.S. Army 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division in the Normandy invasion. Because Bearden’s unit was one of the last to jump on D-Day, the element of surprise was lost and the Germans were prepared for their arrival. He was wounded twice and eventually captured by the Nazis and held as a prisoner until the end of the war. Bearden

has written a book about his experiences called: [To D-Day and Back: Adventures with the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment and Life as a World War II POW](#).

Marino served in the U.S. Army from 1941 to 1946 and left the service as a Private First Class. He spoke of the bravery and generosity of the French people. “The French farmers in Normandy fed us, and their food was much better than the U.S. Army’s food,” he said. After the war ended, he and his fellow soldiers celebrated for a week straight.

After sharing their D-Day memories, Bearden and Marino answered questions and listened to comments from audience members. In one memorable moment, a French woman rose from her seat to thank both men for their service. “If it had not been for American soldiers invading Normandy that day, I would not have the opportunity to be in America listening to you today,” she said. With deep sincerity, Bearden replied, “You were worth it. You were worth fighting for.”

To see more photos of the event, please visit the [D-Day 70th Anniversary album](#) on the VLB Facebook page. Visit the [Voices of Veterans](#) website to listen to audio interviews of Mr. Marino and Mr. Bearden. ☆



Voices of Veterans coordinator James Crabtree discusses D-Day with special guests [Robert Bearden](#) (l) and [Johnny Marino](#).



People line up to meet Bearden and Marino at the conclusion of the D-Day presentation.



Several residents from the Texas State Veterans Homes in Floresville and Temple made the trip to Austin to commemorate D-Day.



Bearden and Allen Bergeron with the city of Austin visit after the D-Day program.

# VLB Recognizes Real Estate Industry Participants with Lone Star Circle Awards

Texas real estate professionals and organizations are recognized every year by the VLB for their outstanding efforts to promote the veteran [land and home loan programs](#).

The VLB's Lone Star Circle Awards are presented to the top real estate brokers and sales agents that represent veteran land buyers who borrow a minimum cumulative total of \$250,000 through the VLB's land loan program each fiscal year. Community developers whose land sales generate a minimum of \$500,000 in VLB land loans during the fiscal year are also recognized with Lone Star Circle Awards.

The five participating lending institutions and loan officers who generate the highest dollar volume of VLB home loans belong to the other two categories that receive Lone Star Circle Awards.

The top-producing professional or organization in each of these four categories receives a Texas flag that has flown over the State Capitol and a certificate from the Chairman of the VLB suitable for framing. All other winners receive a certificate of recognition from the Chairman of the VLB.

The VLB has been making real estate loans to Texas veterans since 1949. Qualified Texas veterans may apply to borrow up to \$100,000 for land within the state. The VLB offers home loans up to \$417,000 through participating lenders.

Finalists for the VLB Lone Star Circle Awards for fiscal year 2014 will be announced in early 2015. For more information please contact Steve Hudson, VLB Real Estate Community Liaison, at 512-936-2553 or [steve.hudson@glo.texas.gov](mailto:steve.hudson@glo.texas.gov). ☆

## Mark Your Calendar: 2015 VLB Benefits Fair Schedule

The Veterans Land Board (VLB) invites you to participate in one of the five VLB veterans benefits fairs scheduled across the state in 2015. Information on VLB programs, including real estate and home improvement loans, the Texas State Veterans Home program and Texas State Veterans Cemeteries will be available. Other veterans organizations and veteran-friendly businesses will also be on hand.

The benefits fairs are informal "come and go" events that generally take place on Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The ex-

ception this year is the Armed Forces Bowl which will be held on Friday, January 2, 2015.

Veterans can visit individually with program staff members to quickly and easily receive information specific to their needs. With extensive media coverage and pre-event mail-outs, large turnouts of veterans are expected. The VLB encourages you to use this opportunity to meet with VLB veterans benefits advisors and veteran-friendly organizations. ☆

### 2015 Benefits Fairs

#### Ft. Worth

January 2, 2015  
10:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Amon Carter Stadium  
at Texas Christian University  
2850 Stadium Dr.

Register for free tickets at:  
<http://www.armedforcesbowl.com/military/military-and-veteran-tickets>

#### Waco

January 24, 2015  
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Waco Veterans Hospital  
4800 Memorial Dr.

#### Corpus Christi

February 7, 2015  
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Corpus Christi VA Specialty Outpatient Clinic  
205 S. Enterprise Pkwy.

#### San Antonio

March 7, 2015  
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Frank Tejeda Outpatient Clinic  
5788 Eckhart Road

#### Tomball

April 18, 2015  
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Tomball VA Outpatient Clinic  
1200 W. Main St.

These benefits fairs are informal "come and go" events that generally take place on Saturdays. The VLB is partnering with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to bring veterans the resources they need the most. To find additional events around the state of Texas in 2015, please visit [texasveterans.com](http://texasveterans.com) or call 800-252-8387 (VETS).

## Low-interest Loans For Veterans

800-252-VETS ★ [TEXASVETERANS.COM](http://TEXASVETERANS.COM)



**BARRY CORBIN**

Award-winning actor, Marine Veteran, Texan



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